

New and rare species found in small Maryland park

by Brent Steury and Betsie Blumberg

THOMAS STONE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IS A small cultural park in Maryland. It occupies 322 acres of fields and woodlands with upland seeps and pocket wetlands. In the past, management has focused on cultural resources. However, the Natural Resource Challenge is expanding that focus and the park's natural resources are now being inventoried. In fall 2001 and spring and summer 2002, inventories of vascular plants at the park identified several state-listed rare, threatened, and endangered species.

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The initial preliminary vegetation community classification study was conducted by a team of natural resource specialists led by Chris Lea of Assateague Island National Seashore. It was undertaken to produce vegetation descriptions for a vegetation map of the park as part of the NPS National Vegetation Mapping Program. That study was followed by a three-day survey by Brent Steury, biologist with National Capital Parks–East, who added 178 plant species to those reported in the preliminary study and also noted some state-listed rare insects.

Sedges are common in wet places. One species, *Carex styloflexa*, bent sedge, previously recorded as rare in Maryland, was found in sufficient numbers at Thomas Stone and other Maryland parks that it is no longer listed. However, two new-to-Maryland varieties of *Carex* were observed in the surveys at the park. Two other sedges recorded are listed as “watchlist” (21 to 100 occurrences in Maryland) and “status uncertain,” respectively.

Two trees listed as state rare species, *Gymnocladus dioica* (Kentucky coffee tree) and *Juglans cinerea* (butternut), were observed. These were apparently planted around the historic Thomas Stone home. Two wildflowers, an endangered Asteraceae and a Boraginaceae listed as “state rare (6 to 20 occurrences) to watchlist” were recorded. And of particular interest, a grass believed to be extirpated in Maryland was noted growing near, but not within, the park, a find that represents the only known population of that fescue in the state.

A butterfly, *Hermeuptychia hermes*, listed as “state rare to watchlist” was sighted during the plant inventory in May. This was the earliest known observation of the Carolina satyr butterfly in Maryland. Four individuals were seen, documenting its status as a resident breeding species. On the same day, a dragonfly, Uhler's sundragon (*Helicordulia uhleri*), listed as “watchlist” was sighted. Another dragonfly, the calico pennant (*Celithemis elisa*), was observed to be common at the park during the June plant inventory. This was a first record for Charles County, Maryland.

The ranking system used here was developed by The Nature Conservancy and has been adopted by all 50 state Natural Heritage Programs. Natural resource inventories are bringing to light the locations of rare, threatened, and endangered species. In small parks like Thomas Stone, natural resource treasures are being discovered. Managing this information requires resolving a conflict between two National Park Service commitments: sharing scientific information and protecting the species. This issue is being addressed as the protocol for managing these data is developed. Meanwhile, at Thomas Stone, inventories of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians are under way, and birds and fish will be next. ■

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